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**PRESS ADVISORY**

No. 148-P  
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Secretary of Defense William Perry will deliver remarks at a TRICARE Change of Chairmanship Ceremony tomorrow, July 6, 1994 at 10:45 a.m. (EDT) at the National Naval Medical Center, (in front of the Main Tower-Building #1), Bethesda, Md.

The event is open to the news media. The point of contact is Commander Al Twyman at (301) 295-5727.

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# NEWS RELEASE

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Remarks by Secretary of Defense William J. Perry

at the National Naval Medical Center

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, July 1994

Thank you very much, Steve, and thank you, Admiral Hagen, for the invitation today.

It was just forty-nine years ago this week, Allied forces had just taken Okinawa. Hundreds of thousands of American servicemen landed and fought as a powerful team to achieve this victory, which proved to be a turning point in the war in the Pacific.

The bravery of medical personnel is often overlooked in the reports of combat heroism. But in the midst of all the courages and sacrifices in Okinawa, one vignette summarizes the actions of thousands of medical personnel throughout our military history.

Pharmacist's Mate Second Class William Halyburton, Junior, served with the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines on Okinawa. As his company pushed its attack of a key area, Halyburton dashed ahead to where an advance unit was being pinned down by enemy fire. Halyburton ran across an open, fire-swept field to treat a wounded Marine. He didn't stop even after the Marine took another bullet -- in fact, Halyburton used his own body to shield his patient. Halyburton continued treating his fallen comrade until he himself was mortally wounded and collapsed.

Petty Officer Halyburton's service went far beyond the call of duty. His action was a particularly dramatic example of actions carried out every day in the Navy and in our armed forces -- taking care of the medical needs of our men and women in uniform, those who have served, and their families. It's a tradition that's upheld every day by you, the people here today and at our military health care facilities nationwide and world-wide.

Today, the Department of Defense is the second largest deliverer of health care in the country, right behind the VA. It's a big job, with two goals: top-notch health care for our people, and the highest level of medical readiness.

Today, I want to underscore my personal commitment to these goals. Then I'd like to touch on some of the changes we're making so that we can keep delivering the best care.

There are two reasons why it's crucial that we maintain the best military health care system we can get. First of all, it's the right thing to do. Second, it is crucial to readiness.

Our people in uniform have volunteered to put their lives on the line to protect our nation and our security. We owe our servicemen and women the highest quality of life possible. In the military, we are family. And like family, we take care of our own.

Quality of life means support for military families who often endure unique stresses and hardships. It means quality child care, and morale, welfare and recreation programs. And it means maintaining top-notch health benefits for service members and families.

Health care is a major concern of our people. Our service members are responsible for keeping healthy and fit, and we're responsible for helping them do that. This means they need the best in diagnosis, treatment and preventive medicine and advice. And their job -- protecting the nation's security -- is inherently dangerous business. In their duties, soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen all experience unique conditions and strains that put special stresses on their health. They work long, grueling hours, often under spartan, hazardous and, during wartime, deadly conditions.

From the Persian Gulf conflict alone, thousands of veterans have been treated for readily diagnosable injuries and illnesses, and many will need regular medical follow-ups. On top of that, DoD and VA physicians have seen several hundred Persian Gulf veterans who have experienced a combination of symptoms that have come to be called "Persian Gulf Syndrome." We're vigorously pursuing the causes and fashioning compensation and disability rules. But in the meantime, we must care for the sick. We want our people to know that first, the Department is concerned about their health; and second, that we intend to manifest that concern with real action.

Also, we want our men and women in uniform, whether they're at home or deployed abroad, to have the peace of mind that we'll care for their families. Family members pay a special price for America's defense.

They face frequent moves, long periods of separation and often endure agonizing uncertainty when their husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers, are sent away from home. Health care is part of a sacred trust. And it's essential to a military force that's prepared to deploy at a moment's notice.

That leads to the second reason why it's crucial to maintain the best health care for our people -- military readiness. Our health care system has a unique and vital mission that sets you apart from your civilian counterparts. That is, we must be able to respond at a moment's notice, to care for our men and women in uniform no matter where they are, at home or abroad, at peace or under fire.

Medical readiness means maintaining a high level of medical resources. It means ensuring the health of the force; it means providing quality health services to all beneficiaries; and it means mobilizing, deploying and sustaining medical assets -- people, training, facilities and equipment -- that can support any military operation in any environment.

In the past two years, medical personnel have deployed to more than 40 countries -- to the former Yugoslavia, to Somalia, Central America, Southwest Asia and the former Soviet Union. We saw the need for medical readiness -- and the best in medical readiness -- in the response to the tragic accident at Pope Air Force Base this spring. In the midst of the blaze and blinding smoke, our medics did what they were trained to do -- they quickly gave treatment and comfort, and moved the injured to the hospital. From orderlies to doctors, medical personnel strained to take care of the injured. When the call came, they were ready and their readiness literally saved dozens of lives. They were ready because they had spent countless hours -- grueling hours -- training to respond to the call to save lives.

To ensure that medical readiness, we must maintain the best health care infrastructure, and the best military hospitals and clinics. We have that right here at the Bethesda Naval Medical Center, which has certainly earned its world-class reputation for medicine, research and training.

It's in these kinds of facilities all over the world that our medical personnel gain and maintain their professional skills and maintain their readiness to support our service members. We must preserve this capability.

Just yesterday, I was talking to an Air Force doctor and I asked him why was he was serving as a doctor in the Air Force, why wasn't it private practice instead when clearly he could have made more money. And he responded to me that indeed he had been in private practice and, just as I had surmised, he had made a lot more money. But, he had come to the Air Force for two reasons; first of all, he wanted to be able to concentrate his medical skills on the delivery of medical care not on administration, and secondly, he wanted to be able to delivery quality health care to all of his clients without regard to their needs. He also went on to say that not everything in his service was roses that there were problems and plenty of them but that the fundamentals were right and that he was committed to providing those fundamentals. And, when I saw his commitment to us, then I had to question what is our commitment back to him and to the rest of the medical personnel -- many of you sitting in the audience serving the military people.

Probably the single biggest thing I can do as Secretary of Defense to ensure a high level of medical readiness is to set our priorities. I don't go out and train doctors, but I do allocate resources. And in the '95 budget, the first one for which I am fully responsible, the health care budget increased by \$200 million even as the overall force structure declined.

But as we protect our resources, we're also seizing the opportunity to improve our military medicine, and reduce costs, by reforming our health care system itself. We are, in fact, leading the nation in health care reform through the TriCare military health plans we're creating here and around the nation for our active duty personnel. By teaming up each region's military medical providers, TriCare will

give wider access to quality care to people in uniform, their family members, and our retirees and their family members. TriCare also will cut costs by reducing overhead and duplication.

Military beneficiaries living in the national capital region are particularly fortunate to be served by this TriCare system. The Bethesda Naval Medical Center, Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Malcolm Grow Air Force Medical Center are three of the best medical facilities in the country, military or civilian. Our goal is to this kind of access to quality health care to all of our people, throughout the United States. And we want to go further.

We plan to make significant improvements in the system for active duty family members, retirees and their families, and survivors. In our plan, these beneficiaries will also be invited to join the TriCare plan in their region, giving them access to a comprehensive package of quality, affordable benefits, regardless of where they live. If they opt not to join TriCare, they also will be able to choose their health care coverage from a range of approved civilian health plans. And in our plan, retirees over 65 now covered by Medicare could choose to join TriCare, with Medicare paying to cover the cost of these beneficiaries.

Let me also report to you today that President Clinton, who as you know is working to assure improved health care for all Americans, has personally assured me of his commitment to a strong military health system. The President is committed to keep the military health system in the hands of the military, to provide our families and retirees with additional health security, and to give them a choice of coverage. This would maintain the two "givens" in military health care: top-notch health care for our people; and the highest level of medical readiness.

America's security, our military readiness and effectiveness, demands that we provide the best health care coverage to our men and women in uniform, our retirees, and all of their families.

But more than that, it's a question of trust -- the trust our forces and retirees deserve to have in their leadership in the military services and the Department of Defense. Our service members put their lives at risk to serve our country. We owe them the greatest confidence that they and their family will get full and complete medical care and treatment. And we will provide it. That is my pledge to you today.

Thank you very much.

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